



THE VULNERABILITY OF LGBT INDIVIDUALS TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons around the world often experience discrimination and elevated threats of violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2013, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Association (ILGA) reported that nearly 80 countries had laws that criminalize people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT persons face elevated threats of violence and discrimination in employment, healthcare, and educational opportunities. Some family members have ostracized LGBT relatives from their homes. The cumulative effects of homophobia and discrimination make LGBT persons particularly vulnerable to traffickers who prey on the desperation of those who wish to escape social alienation and maltreatment.

Governments and NGOs have made progress in identifying LGBT trafficking victims and highlighting the vulnerability of LGBT persons to crimes such as human trafficking. For example, in 2013, NGOs working on LGBT issues in Argentina identified traffickers who promised transgender women job opportunities in Europe, but instead confiscated their passports and forced them into prostitution. Police in the Philippines have identified LGBT trafficking victims during anti-trafficking operations. Civil society in South Africa has identified instances of traffickers coercing LGBT youth to remain in prostitution under threat of disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to their families. As part of the *Federal Strategic Action Plan on Services for Victims of Trafficking in the United States 2013-2017*, U.S. agencies have committed to gathering information on the needs of LGBT victims of human trafficking. NGOs in the United States estimate LGBT homeless youth comprise 20 to 40 percent of the homeless youth population; these youth are at particularly high risk of being forced into prostitution.

Biases and discrimination severely complicate proper identification of, and provision of care to, LGBT victims of human trafficking. Law enforcement officials and service providers should partner with LGBT organizations to enhance victim identification efforts and adapt assistance services to meet the unique needs of LGBT victims. LGBT survivors of human trafficking should also be included in the dialogue on these issues.